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AT THE ORDINATION OF

MR. H. FAIRBANKS, AND MR. H. A. HAZEN,

AT

ST. JOHNSBURY, VT., FEB. 17, 1858,

BY DANIEL J. NOYES,

Professor in Dartmouth College.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

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PRESS OF T. R. MARVIN & SON, 42 CONGRESS STREET.

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Apostolic Test of the Preaching which God has Ordained.

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1 CORINTHIANS I. 21, 18.

FOR AFTER THAT IN THE WISDOM OF GOD THE WORLD BY WISDOM KNEW NOT GOD, IT PLEASSED GOD BY THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING TO SAVE THEM THAT BELIEVE.—FOR THE PREACHING OF THE CROSS IS TO THEM THAT PERISH, FOOLISHNESS; BUT UNTO US WHICH ARE SAVED, IT IS THE POWER OF GOD.

It has always been the temptation of a highly cultivated age, to exalt, unduly, the teachings of natural religion; to ascribe to the reason of man a work which can be accomplished only by a supernatural revelation and the accompanying influences of the Spirit of God. This temptation the Apostle Paul, reasoning in accordance with true philosophy, effectually resisted. He did not stop to inquire, particularly, how much man could know of God and duty without a written revelation. He was satisfied with simply observing, how little he actually did know, or ever had known, with the very best natural means of knowledge—with all the aids furnished by the manifold works of God, and the highest culture of mind. As the

result of such an observation, extending through long and dreary centuries, and over the wide wastes of sin, he found that man, in the most favorable circumstances, never had, by his own wisdom, attained to a true knowledge of God.

Such has ever been the condition of man in a world full of the evidences of God's being and perfections, wherever a supernatural light has not made it to differ. And such, I may add, has ever been his condition, essentially, where it has not been made to differ by something more than the increase of light, even from a supernatural source. He may have certain knowledge of the great fact of God's existence. He may understand much of his natural and moral attributes, of his providential dealings with men, of the revelation which he has made, and the moral government which he administers ; and still, in the most important sense, and in the most emphatic manner, be ignorant of God. There is a vast difference between knowing about God, and actually knowing him. The former may tend, as it often does, to prevent the latter. The wisdom of man, however much enlightened, or however little, so long as it is his wisdom, will prevent his coming to a true and saving knowledge of God. It is not, simply, that his wisdom does not furnish him this knowledge. It is, in fact, the

great obstacle to its attainment—the very reason why he does not obtain it.

The same spirit which led the millions of ancient heathendom to change the glory of the incorruptible God into the image of the most degraded of his creatures, and which is now at work in all the dark places of the earth, is no less active, though manifesting itself in a different form, in the most enlightened portions of Christendom. It as really and effectually divests God of all his perfections, and degrades him, often, below the creature, to the mere principles and properties of matter. It is a melancholy and most humiliating fact, that Atheism, the very denial of God's existence; and Pantheism, that robs God of the attributes which make him God; and Infidelity, in its most subtle and dangerous forms,—are now flourishing in greatest vigor in communities specially distinguished for their intelligence. The rationalism of Germany, the ideal pantheism that is confined to no land, the naturalism which has usurped the name of religion, and even of Christianity, all owe the form of their development, and very much of their strength, to an advanced stage of intellectual improvement—to a mental culture that never would have been obtained without revelation. While the natural spirit of man remains in him, no degree

of intellectual culture, no increase of light from the works of nature, no illumination of the natural understanding, even from the letter of a supernatural revelation, will avail to bring him to the knowledge of God. Increase the light from all these sources a thousand fold, and his wisdom will pervert and reject it, or at least resist it. Work miracles before his eyes, and he will sooner ascribe them to some undeveloped force in nature, than cordially accept the Being who is above nature. Reveal truth with all the self-evidencing power that can accompany it, and it has no evidence to a mind blinded by its own wisdom. The world will not know God so long as it can prevent it; and it can prevent it, so long as intelligence is the only obstacle.

The great want, then, the absolute necessity of man, is not, and never was, a revelation of mere knowledge, but a revelation of power in connection with it, to render the knowledge effectual—to come between a depraved will and an abused intellect, and so to rectify the former, that it will rightly use the latter. How vain is the expectation of those who look for the world's regeneration by its increased intelligence. In the wisdom of God, the trial has been made—a trial which ought to satisfy every mind, that the world by wisdom will never know God.

When it was found necessary that God should interfere directly for man's recovery, if ever he was to be restored to a true knowledge of him, what method shall he adopt? What instrumentality shall he use? All the resources of the universe were open before him, and at his disposal. The eloquence of the forum and the senate; the wisdom and philosophy of the schools; the deep secrets and hidden forces of nature, which the intervening centuries have not yet fully revealed; the varied powers of men and angels,—all were at his command, and any or all of them could be enlisted in this work. Whatever means, therefore, God should see fit to adopt, whether natural or supernatural; whether such as we should beforehand have supposed, or such as we never could have conceived of; whether such as commend themselves to us as wise and fit for their object, or such as appear to us even weak and foolish; we should know, assuredly, that since it was from him, it was the means best adapted to the end.

It pleased God, of all the possible instrumentalities, to make choice of what the Apostle denominates the "foolishness of preaching." This chosen instrumentality, original and divine, bears the impress of infinite wisdom and power. Rich were the trophies which it early won in the cause of

human redemption ; and its progress through the intervening centuries is almost the only pathway of light over what would otherwise be a trackless waste. Its power has been witnessed, in all its early freshness and vigor, in the conquests which it has achieved in later times. Christendom itself, with its science and literature, its art, its commerce, its civil and religious liberty, its domestic happiness—all that adorns, ennobles and blesses man here, and sheds over the endless future of his being the light of immortal glory—all this is its monument.

Think not that I claim too much for this divine instrumentality. As it was ordained of God for the salvation of men, so, in his wisdom, and by his grace, has it been made effectual, directly or indirectly, I had almost said, to every soul that has been saved since its appointment. It is not too much to say, that the continued existence of the written word has been dependent upon it. Never, certainly, would that word have been so widely diffused in early times without it ; and, in our own day, the power which has multiplied the Scriptures, and scattered them as the leaves of autumn among the nations, has emanated mainly from the pulpit. What is true of the general diffusion of the Scriptures, is equally true of the reading of

them. It is a fact which few have failed to notice, that where the gospel is not preached, there it is but little read. In the ultimate analysis, it will be found, that the power of God to salvation has been exerted almost exclusively through the preaching of the word. This instrumentality, honored in centuries past, has not been superseded. It has created for itself valuable auxiliaries—agencies that we would not willingly dispense with; but the life, the vigor, the power of them all, is in the original, divine institution.

But it is not preaching in the sense, simply, of oral, public discourse on religion, that has wrought so mightily for God and man. It is not all preaching that has been crowned with such results. This honor is reserved for a peculiar kind of preaching—for that preaching which the wisdom of this world has united in calling foolishness. It is by “the foolishness of preaching” that it has pleased God to save them that believe. But all preaching that is called foolishness by the world, is not the preaching which God has chosen and honored. The world does not always err in its application of the offensive term. The Apostle, therefore, adds respecting the preaching which it has pleased God to adopt, that while it appears foolish to the world, it is, in view of spiritual

minds, and in its effect upon them, the power of God and the wisdom of God. "We preach," says he, "Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness; but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God." Thus the subject matter of preaching, in the divine scheme of salvation, is carefully guarded, bearing these distinguishing marks, viz: that while it is foolishness to the worldly mind, apparently weak and really offensive, it is, to the spiritual mind, the well-trained heart in sympathy with God, the highest wisdom, the most excellent power.

I propose to consider, as not inappropriate to the occasion, the kind of preaching that bears these Apostolic marks—that lies between these carefully and firmly drawn lines.

I. The first distinguishing characteristic of such preaching, which I shall notice, is *the exclusively supernatural character of its subject matter*. It is not a body of important truth, learned by induction from nature. It is not a collection of the scattered rays of light, which the reason of man

had shed, here and there, amidst the darkness of long centuries. It is not the expression, in a definite form, of what had always lived in man, in the lowest depths of the soul, waiting to be called forth—the verifying and fulfilling of prophetic voices that had ever been uttered, in indistinct tones, by the crushed and imprisoned spirit. But it is a distinct, authoritative, independent revelation of supernatural truth, of the things of God, of his own deep things, of his moral attributes, of his mysterious and eternal purposes, and of his methods of grace, which only his own infinite understanding could know, or make known. It is wholly supernatural. It is entirely, *ab extra*, coming down from a higher region, a supernatural realm, to meet wants that are supernatural in man. It is given in a supernatural manner, revealed from heaven by plenary inspiration, so that every word is the exact expression of the divine will; the whole declaring, authoritatively, “what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man”—a perfect revelation, not to be added to, or diminished in the least degree, on the penalty of God’s severest displeasure.

There are, indeed, truths in the Christian revelation, entering deeply into the subject matter of the preaching which God has ordained, that, in the

mere letter of them, are natural ; that may be learned, in some degree, without revelation. They are of the earth—discoverable and actually discovered by man. Such, for instance, is much of the history and ethics of the Bible. But even these, by reason of a more perfect revelation of them, and by the authority which is given to them, are elevated above the lower plane of nature, and become, in their very life and spirit, truly supernatural. They rest on a higher authority than the reason of man, and, as thus sustained and enforced, they are to be used by the preacher.

Now it is needless to say, that preaching which has to do exclusively with such a scheme of truth, is, in view of the world, foolishness. Like its divine Author, it has come into the world, and the world has not received it. The time indeed is past, when Christianity, as recorded in the Christian Scriptures, is formally and directly denied, except by a few, and those generally of the most degraded class. But it meets with as little favor from the spirit that is really of the world, as ever. Infidelity, in its present most popular form, very condescendingly admits, that Christianity is the best existing development of the religious nature of man—the best outward expression of the absolute religion. But it is only a development and

expression of what was already in man. It admits even that its authors were inspired ; but only with the natural inspiration that awakens in the poet noble sentiments, and urges the warrior to heroic deeds. In all this, the supernatural element of the gospel is really and intentionally rejected.

The same spirit, in a more subtle form, is at work, very indirectly indeed, and for the most part unconsciously, but yet very powerfully, in connection with modern science. It may seem extravagant to say it, but I think it is nevertheless true, that inductive science has furnished the weapons, unwittingly often, by which Atheism has driven God from his world ; by which Pantheism has divested him of his personality, and consequently of his moral attributes ; by which Epicureanism has destroyed his direct and constant efficiency, and removed him to a distant part of his universe. Bacon did great service, no doubt, to science, but very little, I fear, to supernatural religion. It is a serious question, whether his philosophy has not been the occasion, the innocent occasion, of greater spiritual evil, than can be compensated for by all the material good that ever has, or ever will result from it. And this evil is done mainly by unduly exalting phenomena, with which alone inductive science has to do—by directing attention, exclu-

sively, to facts in nature, their existence and classification. It asks for no cause, efficient or final. It needs none for its most mature results.

The principle of inductive reasoning is just as well suited to atheism as to theism. In the hands of Newton, it leads to a point where a First Cause is inferred—to a personal God; and is thus indirectly theistic. In the hands of Compté, it finds no place for an efficient cause, and therefore rejects a personal God, and is atheistic. The conclusion in one case is just as scientific as it is in the other; that is, it is not a conclusion which is reached by science in either case. The whole theory of physical development proceeds on this principle. This habit of contemplating phenomena, and using the language appropriate to them, tends to make the impression, on the common mind, that there is nothing but phenomena. The language of science, its forms of expression, the habits of thought which it occasions, are carried from the phenomena in nature to the revealed facts of Scripture, and tend most powerfully to divest them of their supernatural character—to weaken the impression which, as supernatural truths, they are fitted to make on the mind. Now why does the common language of science differ so widely from the language of Scripture, in its description of natural

phenomena? Why is a personal God so carefully excluded from it? Does not this clearly show the tendency of the wisdom of this world to look at the natural, to the exclusion of the supernatural—to regard the latter as comparative folly?

In the field of literature, the same evil exists, to a still greater extent, and in a more decided form. Not a little of the poetry of Germany, of England, and of our own country—and that, too, of the highest intellectual and most serious character, in some instances—has not failed to exalt the natural above the supernatural, to deify and worship nature. It is decidedly pantheistic in its tendency, if not in its intention. The same principle and spirit will be found to underlie what may be called the subjective, or spiritual philosophy of the times.

Who can have witnessed, with any attention, this undercurrent of thought, which indeed too often reaches the surface, and have seen its influence in moulding the moral sentiments of the age, and still doubt that supernaturalism is an offence and folly to the natural mind? How carefully does it guard against it! How does it aim, instinctively, to avoid it; to ward off its most distant approaches, and to gather around itself a defence which shall be impenetrable to every weapon of attack.

But there is a form of naturalism more insidious still than this, which it particularly becomes us to consider, as it not unfrequently deceives the very elect. It may be denominated, the naturalism of the supernatural. It fully recognizes the supernatural origin of divine truth. It regards it as coming from God by a direct revelation, but places its authority on a natural basis. The truth supernaturally furnished, is the material with which the natural reason is enabled to operate over a broader sphere, but still upon the same plane. It is as really and truly naturalism in its spirit, in its whole character, as though it had to do only with truth which the light of nature could furnish. This type of naturalism may be illustrated by the views which are often entertained and expressed of the law of God, both as respects its precept and its penalty. The law is fully recognized, in all its precepts, as the law of God, coming from him through a revelation which is altogether above nature, and wholly distinct from it. But beyond this, the supernatural element does not extend. It is made dependent, for its authority, entirely upon human reason—upon the natural constitution of man. It is felt to be obligatory in any given case, because the ‘imperative of the conscience demands’ the thing required; because it is seen to be right

‘in the nature of things,’ to accord with the eternal principles of rectitude, to be required by the fitness of things ; or because it should be done for its own sake.

Now all such grounds of obligation are in the man himself, and do not recognize, in the least degree, a higher will. The authority would appear just as great as it is now felt to be, if there were no God. The principle of obedience is no higher than that which is recognized in the philosophy of the Stoics—no higher than nature. Thus the entire authority of law, in the whole field of moral action, is in the man himself. The will of God does not come into the account, except as indicating what the natural reason approves. In all this, consequently, there can be no religion, no service rendered to God, no obedience to his law. Revelation is thus made to differ from nature only in the extent of its field of vision.

In the minds, often, of intelligent men, this difference between morality and religion is not clearly and sharply distinguished. It is supposed to be in the things done, rather than in the spirit with which they are done. But this does not distinguish them at all. Both may be conversant about the same things—things which relate either to God or man. The difference is entirely in the

animating principle and spirit of the agent. The controlling principle in religion, that which makes it religion, is love to God — love rendered in obedience to the personal will of God. Under the influence of this principle, a person does what is required, not because it is seen to be in itself wise or good, but because it is seen to be required of God.

On the other hand, the controlling principle in morality — the principle in accordance with which an action is done — is its perceived rightness or fitness. The action is not done because it is commanded by an infinitely perfect Being, but because it appears right in itself. Now it is on this latter ground that the authority of the divine law, in naturalism, is made to rest. Hence the supernatural is excluded, and excluded, it is to be feared, by the preacher often, when he little suspects it. It is always done effectually, when the claims of the law, or the gospel, are not made to rest entirely on the authority of God. The will of God may often be learned by the tendencies and results of conduct. But in all such cases, the obligation respecting conduct depends entirely on the will of God, and not, in the least degree, on the perceived consequences.

The same principle is even more strikingly man-

ifest in respect to the penalty of the law. The revealed fact of punishment—of future, eternal punishment—is fully recognized as a supernatural truth, made known in a supernatural manner. But here again the supernatural ceases. Punishment is not regarded as the expression of God's displeasure, and directly inflicted by his hand. It is not, in fact, viewed as punishment in the proper sense of the word; but as pain, suffering, harm, resulting from the necessary working of natural laws.

We are represented as carrying the elements of punishment in our intellectual and moral constitution; in the memory which will bring up the dark record of the past; in the imagination which will clothe the endless future with terror; in the conscience which will scourge us with its scorpion lash. This is doubtless all true; but it is not, of itself, truth in its divine relations. Separated from its proper connections, it is essential error. That God will, in this way, in part at least, execute the penalty of his law, we have every reason to believe. But the danger is, that God's agency, operating in this way, will be overlooked, and attention fixed upon natural causes. Just so far as this is the case, it is not God that inflicts the suffering, as an expression of his displeasure, but the suffering

is the result of a constitution which has its own established laws.

This is not the Scripture view of the subject. The foolishness of God, in this respect, is wiser than man. He has revealed truth, on this subject, in a form best suited to the nature of man. The terrible imagery of Scripture, in which God sets forth the punishment which he will inflict on the transgressors of his law, cannot safely be dispensed with in any age, or condition of society. Its place cannot be supplied with representations of mental sufferings, which must necessarily follow from the laws of mind. What do the uneducated mass, or even the educated generally, care about discourses on the workings of conscience and corrupt desires. They make very little impression upon them. They are often, I doubt not, regarded as a virtual admission that there is no future punishment, such as the Bible reveals. It was not with such preaching that Jonathan Edwards and Richard Baxter caused their hearers to tremble in view of the wrath of God, and to feel that their feet were ready to slide into the flames of hell.

Naturalism, in this same insidious form, lays hold of the specific doctrines of the gospel, and divests them of their supernatural element. The new birth, repentance, and faith, are all urged as

revealed truths and essential; but essential on the ground of their suitableness, their fitness to our felt necessities, their adaptation to our highest improvement, to a more advanced and perfect education of all our powers. Thus the cross itself loses its offence, and becomes the mere symbol of natural truth — an essential principle among the necessary agencies of man's perfect development.

It is worthy of serious inquiry, whether this form of naturalism does not hold too prominent a place now in our pulpits. The great conflict, of every age, has been between the natural and the supernatural. The world loves the one, and hates the other. The one it regards as wisdom, the other as folly. It is very instructive to observe, that just in proportion as natural religion has been exalted, the supernatural has been undervalued. This is strikingly illustrated in the history of early English infidelity. Revelation was not regarded as false, but undervalued as unnecessary. This is the underlying principle of all the forms of spurious Christianity at the present time. Nothing is to be accepted which does not commend itself to the natural reason. This principle, it is to be feared, is making too much progress with some who would now be very unwilling to admit it to the full extent.

It is manifest that the foolishness of God is wiser than man, in selecting a supernatural scheme of salvation ; and so it appears “to them that are called” — to all who have spiritual discernment. The power of truth to save men, to renew and sanctify the soul, is exclusively in its supernatural character. Fallen man is in the realm of nature, and his religion is strictly natural religion. It has to do only with what is natural in God, as well as in his works. Now in order to raise him up from this low plane, to stir the depths of his religious nature, and to give him a discernment of spiritual things, there must be a revelation of God — not God as learned in nature, clothed only in natural attributes ; but a revelation of the personal God, the holy and just God, to his inmost soul. It is with the moral attributes — the constituting attributes of a supernatural God — that man as a sinner, and a subject of his government, has to do. When these come in close contact with the guilty soul — when the personal God and the personal sinner are brought together — then is divine truth as fire in the soul, a sword to slay its enmity, a subduing power, even the power of God to salvation.

All this is abundantly confirmed by experience. What is it that produces, in the worldly man, deep

thoughtfulness about his salvation — profound conviction of sin? What is it that brings him, at length, a willing subject at the feet of divine mercy? Is all this accomplished by truth taught us in nature, or even by supernatural truth, that has its authority only in the natural reason? No; it results only from divine truth, seen and felt to be in close connection with God—truth that comes from God, and demands obedience only on the authority of God. Such preaching is offensive to the sinner; but it is saving, and saving because it is offensive—because it meets and overcomes the opposition of the heart to God.

But if it be offensive, and appear foolish to him while a sinner, while writhing under its power, no sooner does he submit to it, than its folly is turned to wisdom, and it evermore bears, in his view, the other mark of true, Apostolic preaching—the preaching with which God designed to save them that believe. When the soul is renewed, and its deepest wants become the subject of consciousness, the supernatural at once takes the place of the natural. It is no longer “nature,” but God. It is no longer “the fitness of things,” but divine authority. It is no longer “Christianity,” but Christ. It is all God; not God clothed in his natural attributes, but God clothed in his infinite

moral perfections — God in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.

II. The divinely appointed preaching whose subject matter is supernatural truth, has for its *exclusive object* the *salvation* of the *soul*. Salvation, I mean, in distinction from reformation, or natural improvement, either individual or social. It regards man, not simply or mainly as weak, and therefore needing strength; as ignorant, and needing instruction and guidance; as erring, and requiring correction. But it regards him as a sinner against God, not only doing wrong, but being wrong, not as partially corrupt, but as spiritually dead, and therefore requiring a new and divine life in the soul. Moreover, it regards him mainly in his relations to another world, and looks upon his brief sojourn here only as preparatory to a higher and endless existence.

With such views of the character and destiny of man, its exclusive aim is to accomplish for him a spiritual work—to bring him under the influence of supreme love to God as the controlling principle of life, as the essential element of his moral being, without which the most beautiful expressions of natural affection, of generous sympathy—the noblest exercise of stern integrity, of incor-

ruptible honesty, of disinterested patriotism, have no worth in the sight of God. This is the sole end of redemption, and the sole end of the gospel as the means of redemption; and the sole end of preaching, as the means of making the gospel effectual.

“Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost;” and, true to the work of his mission, every thing that he did and suffered on earth had a direct and sole reference to this salvation as its end. When he first sent forth his disciples, his commission to them was to do a single work—to secure, if possible, a single object. It had no reference to wealth, or to the honors of the world, or to secular advantages in any form, to themselves or others. Like unto this, was his last command to those who were to be foremost in carrying out the principles of the new religion, and in establishing his kingdom upon the earth. They were to go forth, and simply make disciples to him of all nations, of every creature—preaching repentance and faith, as the single and sole condition of acceptance. As he had done, so were they and their successors to do, to the end of time. So the Apostles understood their commission, and accordingly labored and suffered to convert men to God—to save them from their sins. The whole written

word, which reveals to us the mind of Christ and the nature of his kingdom, speaks to the same effect. It addresses men only with reference to salvation. Other and happy effects have been the result of a preached gospel, and are destined to be in a yet higher degree; but they are only incidental, and not even desirable when disconnected from the main object to be secured.

Now it is manifest that this is not the world's view of the subject; and preaching, thus contemplated, is comparatively foolishness in its regard. The world practically takes an entirely different view of man, both as to his character and destiny. Without denying what the gospel says on the subject, it virtually ignores it all. Man is really regarded as only of this world, with relations and prospects only temporal; with a character imperfect, indeed, but needing only development and culture, proper excitement and restraint. Preaching, as adapted to man thus viewed, is regarded by the world as a most important institution — an instrumentality that cannot be dispensed with. All have seen, in the progress of civilization, that it is indispensable to sound morality, to general intelligence, to good government, to domestic happiness, and whatever promotes man's highest and best interests for this life. Hence they are

ready to commend it, and generally are willing to make exertions to sustain it.

But this they do, I repeat it, not on account of its original, specific design, but as one of many moral instrumentalities well suited to combat the evils with which society is afflicted—to improve the moral and social condition of man—to give more stability to government, greater force to law, more security to property—to plead the claims of the suffering, and advance the cause of philanthropy and human right—in a word, to breathe a soothing, restraining, quickening influence over society. Preaching, as thus contemplated, is, in the world's esteem, wisdom and power; but in reality, it is comparative folly and weakness. Just in proportion as this idea prevails, practically, is the gospel of Christ shorn of its power to bless the world. Just so far as it is contemplated, mainly or prominently, as a means of promoting directly man's comfort and general well-being in this world—and thus appeals to his present interests—just in that degree will it be likely to lose its power over the conscience and heart, in reference to the higher ends for which it was designed.

If the impression exists, that the great object for which it was given is to convert the world into an earthly paradise—to make men intelligent,

refined, benevolent, good citizens and good neighbors — then, so far as men possess this character, will they conclude that the gospel has accomplished its work in respect to them. They are not deficient in the virtues, which they understand it to be the object of the gospel to produce. They have even whereof to glory. It is easy to see, that the doctrines of the cross must be comparatively powerless on such minds. It must be very awkward for a minister who entertains such views, in any considerable degree, to attempt to use these doctrines. They appear foolishness to him, as well as to his hearers. They do not seem adapted to the end in view. Why should he speak of alienation from God, of regeneration, or the atonement? What has God, or Christ, to do in such a scheme? What has the gospel to do? Nothing. He can consistently and logically preach nothing but natural ethics. And as a matter of fact, many a servant of God, without being aware of it, does actually preach but little else. It is easy to see that such preaching has no adaptedness to produce conviction of sin as against God, to lead to faith in Christ, and thus secure the salvation of the soul. It is utterly powerless to this, the primary, the exclusive end of preaching. It is emphatically foolishness.

Nor is there really much more wisdom, or much more power in it, to secure what the world regards as the true end of preaching. Society can be effectually reformed, philanthropy safely and wisely advanced, humanity really elevated, the world made essentially better, only as the individual heart is renewed and sanctified by the Spirit of God. Vice may become less offensive, crime less gross, wickedness in its various forms more refined, under the influence of intellectual and moral culture. But vice, crime and wickedness will remain, and be on the whole as destructive as ever to the best interests of man. It is divine grace in the hearts of the few now — not intelligence and good laws — that makes society in our communities so desirable. It is living piety, practical godliness, that is the vitalizing principle of New England thrift, intelligence and morality. Temporal interests will always be well cared for, where eternal interests are zealously sought. Let the soul be neglected, and soon there will be none to care for the body. Whoever would truly benefit man for this world, must confer upon him blessings that will effectually benefit him for the world to come. No preaching that aims at any thing short of the salvation of the soul, directly, can be effectual, to any

considerable extent, to man's temporal good. It will be weak, if not foolish.

One of the essential elements of power in preaching — the power of God to salvation — will be found in what the world regard its folly, viz., its *exclusively spiritual object*. Such is the view of truly spiritual minds; and hence, just in proportion as they have been filled with the spirit of Christ, have they made the salvation of the soul their primary object. They have labored to convert men to Christ — to promote their sanctification — to secure a practical and spiritual regard to whatever is lovely and of good report for the honor of Christ. Here, again, both the marks of Apostolic preaching appear — apparent folly and real wisdom.

III. The preaching which it has pleased God to adopt for the salvation of men, has *for its main subject, redemption by the cross of Christ*. It is redemption; not in a secondary, figurative sense, but in the primary, literal sense of the word, which it aims to exhibit and enforce. It regards man not only as lost, but so lost as to need deliverance by a price, and that price — blood. “Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as

silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Here, in this most expressive language, is the doctrine of the cross. Here is revealed the great fact on which all our hopes depend, that Christ bore the punishment of our sin in his own person; that he made expiation for it by dying in our stead; so that by faith in him, by the imputation of his righteousness, God can consistently save us.

The offer of salvation, thus procured, constitutes the preaching of the cross — a preaching which, I need not say, is to the world — to the natural man every where, and at all times — foolishness. It is foolishness, because no where taught in nature, which is the world's standard of wisdom; no glimpse of it is seen in its deepest mysteries. It is not discernible by the natural reason, nor comprehended by it when revealed. It is foolishness to the world, to the natural mind — which has but a very imperfect sense of the nature or the evil of sin — that such a sacrifice should ever have been made for it. It appears foolish to expect the satisfaction of justice — if justice must be satisfied at all — in a manner so strange. What justice can there be in

laying the punishment of the guilty on the head of the innocent? or how can justice be satisfied by such an infliction?

Here it will be found, as before, that that which is folly in man's esteem, is both the wisdom of God and the power of God to salvation. No philosophy can fully analyze the power of the cross, or explain the secret of its mysterious and subduing influence over the soul. It is known, effectually, only in the deep experience of the heart that has bowed before it. It is perhaps enough to know in this way, and by its mighty conquests, that it is the power of God. But some of the elements of this power may be explained. They are such as the sanctified reason of man can comprehend, and from which he may gather increased confidence in the divinely appointed methods of grace. But on this theme, so rich and so full of interest to the Christian, I must not enter.

Redemption by the cross—notwithstanding all that it has achieved, all the manifestations of its power for centuries—is, in the world's esteem, weakness and folly. It thus bears, most signally, one of the marks, indicated by the Apostle, of the preaching by which it has pleased God to save them that believe. It bears, also, the other distinguishing mark so plainly, that none can

mistake it. "To them which are called," it is both the wisdom of God and the power of God. They have no confidence whatever in preaching that does not exalt the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and aim to save men exclusively by its power. They have seen the utter weakness of all motives drawn from any other source to subdue the heart, and they turn away from them in despair, to glory only in the cross of Christ. They see there, a wisdom that shines with ineffable brightness, and a power that is most precious and constraining—a power to melt the heart in deepest penitence—a power to quicken it with the liveliest emotions of gratitude—a power to clothe it with meekness and humility—a power to sustain it amidst the sorrows of earth, and to fill it, in heaven, with the highest joy and the purest happiness forever.

IV. Another and very important characteristic of the preaching which it has pleased God to adopt for saving men, is, that *the power which renders it effectual is entirely of God*. It is not the preaching even of supernatural truth, not the preaching of the cross itself, that saves men, or that by which men save themselves. But it is God himself, of his own good pleasure, who saves them. It is God's agency that renews the heart, and that not

mediately, but immediately; not naturally, by a fixed chain of cause and effect, but supernaturally. Though he does it in connection with the truth, his agency is not upon the truth—not simply upon the mind, to awaken it to reflection—not upon any of the constitutional powers merely, to arouse them to more vigorous action; but it is directly upon the heart, to create there a new life. And this agency is necessary, because of the absolute inability of man to render obedience to God without it.

Now to the world, to the natural man, this is foolishness in the extreme; and foolish for two reasons especially:—1. That God should require of man that which he has not ability to do; and 2. Because he has the consciousness, or thinks he has, of perfect ability to do all that is required of him. He has no idea of helplessness. He does not understand what it means.

Though such preaching bears the mark of folly in the world's esteem, it is, in reality, preaching radiant with wisdom and clothed with power. But I can only indicate, and that in the briefest manner, and in a single direction, what I would like to say on this most important point. In urging the truth of man's entire dependence on the Spirit of God, we show him not only his helplessness in himself—a most important truth—but

what is more important, his sinfulness also, as the ground of helplessness. The doctrine of man's absolute inability, is the most impressive and effective mode of teaching him his guilt. He learns the strength of his opposition to God by the fact, that it surpasses all his power to overcome it. And never does he practically learn the real nature and strength of sin, in any other way. So long as a person entertains the idea of ability in himself, in the least degree, so long will his views of sin, and his experience of sin, be exceedingly superficial. But along with the sense of his utter helplessness comes a deeper, more thorough and correct experimental knowledge of sin. It is now felt to be something more than doing wrong ; it is being wrong. It is something more than actual transgression ; it is a corruption of the moral nature, and is antecedent to all wrong acts of the soul. It gives a character to the will, which no effort of its own can change.

Such was the Apostle's experience. So strong did he find this law in his nature, that when he would do good, evil was present with him, as something beyond the power of his will to prevent. In order, therefore, that the pride of man may be effectually humbled, and the great fact of his entire sinfulness, his utter ruin, realized in the very

depths of his soul, the doctrine of his utter helplessness must hold a prominent place in the instructions of the pulpit. It is a truth fundamental to the whole Christian scheme. Until it is thoroughly wrought into the soul, there is no effectual preparation for the sacrifice and righteousness of Christ. There is no felt need of the renewing influences of the Spirit. It is just as important, practically, that the sinner should feel his inability to do the work of the Spirit in regeneration, as his inability to do the work of Christ in making an atonement for sin. Men may differ respecting this doctrine, in their philosophy; but in their Christian experience, if it is deep, thorough and genuine, they are at one. They may not talk alike about it, but they will feel alike.

The power of this truth, viz: that salvation is achieved only by the agency of the Holy Spirit, is greatly increased when the sovereignty of God, in the exercise of this agency, is made prominent. There is a great difference between the doctrine, that a divine agency is necessary to salvation, and the doctrine, that regeneration is a sovereign act of God's Spirit directly upon the heart. The former is readily admitted, in the laxest forms of theology, and on the same principle that divine agency is necessary to man's success in any department of

the natural world. The latter finds no favor with the human heart, until renewed by divine grace, because it breaks the chain of cause and effect, and casts the soul entirely upon the mercy of God. The doctrine of divine sovereignty, in this relation of it, seems to have been revealed to make the personality of God in relation to the personal sinner stand out with the greatest possible clearness, and thus prevent the natural tendency of the mind to reduce even spiritual influences to a natural law.

The wisdom of God, therefore, is very manifest in making this truth so prominent in the preaching which he has chosen for saving men. And so it appears to the renewed heart. In no truth does the Christian more rejoice, than in that of his absolute dependence on the Spirit of God, acting in a sovereign manner, for every good thought or feeling; and it is only as he lives in accordance with this truth, that he can make the least progress in the work of his sanctification. Here, then, are the two Apostolic marks of genuine preaching. Our limits will not allow further illustration of the subject.

Such is the preaching which God has chosen — a preaching which commends itself to the sanctified wisdom of his people, to the church of Christ

in every age. It has its foundation in the profoundest philosophy, and in the deepest wants of our nature. It first meets and overcomes the opposition of the heart to God. And in doing this—in order to do this—it must, in the nature of the case, be an offence. When this-unpleasant but necessary work is done—when the heart is renewed, its tastes and affections changed—it becomes the source of its highest and purest joy—the means of its elevated and endless improvement. Its history confirms all that revelation has announced respecting it—all that the highest reason approves. Those who will not respect it for what it is, must honor it for what it has done—must at least admit that it is clothed with no ordinary power.

I need not stop to speak of its early triumphs; how, in its very infancy, it poured contempt upon the wisdom of the schools; how it palsied the arm of persecuting power; how it rebuked and destroyed the idolatry of the people. Nor need I speak of its power in conflict with error, when, in the fourth century, Augustine, strong in its strength, confounded Pelagius and his followers; or tell how, in the 16th century, it clothed with power the mighty arm of Calvin against his opponents; or remind you of its triumph, when, in the

18th century, Edwards raised up and strengthened by it the drooping hands of the Puritan faith. It is enough that we see it now in its manhood, in all its strength; not in repose, rejoicing in the laurels it has won, but pressing forward to yet nobler achievements.

Behold it, then! Look where you will, you cannot fail to see it. It has shed, and is now shedding, the light of life on every continent. It is making glad the islands of the sea. It is annually gathering thousands in heathen lands around the standard of the cross; and, in lands that have long been its home, it is giving to man a nobler culture, and to society an ornament of grace. There is not a Protestant missionary station in the world which it has not planted; nor a Bible in any language, or dialect, which it has not translated.

Such fruits as these are the product of that preaching which bears plainly the Apostolic marks of genuineness — preaching, which the world calls foolish, unphilosophical, unreasonable; but which the church of Christ has ever regarded and ever loved, as the wisdom of God and the power of God. But whenever and wherever a preaching of any name, standing in the wisdom of men, approved and honored by the world as rational and philo-

sophical, has appeared — whether in the first century, or in the nineteenth century; whether in lands where Christianity early made its appearance, or in New England, the very home of learning and liberal culture—its fruits have been contemptible.

Would you compare the stern, manly, uncompromising faith which bears the marks of God's wisdom and power, with liberal Christianity—I will not say in its spiritual, saving effects, for the cross alone is the power of God to salvation, but in its influence on the morals of society—let the well known testimony of one who had made the trial of both suffice. Says the eloquent Chalmers, the most powerful preacher of his age, after an experiment of twelve years: “I could expatiate on the meanness of dishonesty, on the villainy of falsehood, on the despicable arts of calumny, on all those deformities of character which awaken indignation against the pests and disturbers of human society. Now the interesting fact is, that during the whole of that period, in which I made no attempt against the enmity of the carnal mind to God, I certainly did press the reformatations of honor, and truth, and integrity among my people; but I never once heard of any such reformation being effected. I am not sensible that all the vehemence with which I urged the virtues and propri-

eties of social life, had the weight of a feather on the moral habits of my parishioners." Such was his experience; and it was not till he urged upon his hearers, as perishing sinners, the doctrines of the cross, that he saw any important change in their morals.

It may seem very remarkable—it does so appear to some—that those creeds which are supposed to commend themselves so fully to the wisdom of men, to be so perfectly rational and philosophical, and which, at the same time, accord so well with the natural feelings of the heart, should not secure and retain more adherents; and that, too, in the most intellectual age of the world, and after the fullest trial. Christianity without the offence of the cross, according to their philosophy, should long ago have swept over New England, at least, and not left a relic of the hard, severe, irrational faith of the Puritans remaining. None should be found to glory in the name and the faith of the Genevan reformer. The Catechism which our fathers and mothers loved, and faithfully taught their children, should have place only as evidence of the darkness of a former age.

But, for some reason or other, it is not so. Instructive, exceedingly instructive, is the recent published confession of one who stands in the very

foremost ranks of liberal Christianity in our country: "It must awaken," says he, "our special wonder, to observe what a miserable minority of adherents the liberal faith has won, and what an immense majority of adherents the Augustinian scheme retains." "Why is it," he asks, "that liberal Christianity advances with such a creeping, faltering pace, notwithstanding its apparently irresistible attractions and recommendations?" It is easy to answer why. It is for the simple reason that it is not true, and that it cannot meet the stern demands of the human soul in its ruins. And above all, and more than all, it is not associated with the power of God. It is not the channel of his grace to man. While the nature of man shall remain what it is, the stern, humbling, uncompromising faith of the cross alone can meet its wants. This can do it fully, perfectly. It is God's remedy for all the evils of the world. Would that the world, the Christian world, had confidence in it *as it is* — that they would never swerve from it — never pervert it; but believe it, if for no other reason, for its works' sake.

Whenever we are tempted to soften down the stern features of the Puritan faith, so that it may smile pleasantly on the carnal mind; or to round the sharp corners of its doctrines, so that they shall

not cut the enmity of the natural heart, but only press it gently ; or so to modify it that human reason shall call it superhuman, in courtesy to us for making it human ; or in any way to remove the offence of the cross, except in God's way, by removing the ground of that offence in the sinfulness of the human heart ; let us remember that the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. Let us remember, too, that this noble faith once delivered to the saints, not only bears marks of its supernatural origin, and, to the spiritual mind, the bright image of divinity, but that it has proved itself competent to fulfill all its claims. Now if the world, in its pride, or its malice, will call it foolishness, let this be another and conclusive evidence that it is the wisdom of God and the power of God to salvation.

After a discussion already too protracted, it is not necessary, as would seem most natural, to urge the duty of the minister of Christ to abide sacredly by the preaching which God has ordained — not to aim at any other object than the salvation of the soul, or to use any other means to accomplish it than that which God has appointed. Leaving this most important topic for personal application by

my brethren in the sacred office, I would claim your indulgence only for a moment, while I remark, very briefly, upon the true grandeur and dignity of the work of which we have spoken, and which the occasion brings before us with so much interest.

I would not have the world's unworthy opinion of the preaching which God has ordained and honored remain, even in the slightest degree, in your minds. I would have it stand before you evermore, in its true character, in all its moral grandeur and sublimity. It bears the unquestioned seal of Divinity. It is emphatically, literally, a sacred office, a divine calling—selected of God above all others, and separate from all others, for a specific and most noble work. It aims not to effect material objects, or to promote material interests. It labors not to extend the blessings of a high civilization, of good learning, of generous culture and refinement over the world—to clothe its deserts and waste places with verdure—to make the earth, in all its wide extent, rejoice in the beauty and freshness of the primeval Eden. This, indeed, would be a work which man, in the most enlarged wisdom, and in the exercise of the most expansive benevolence that has ever been known without the gospel, has never anticipated

in his brightest visions of the future advancement of the race.

But this is not the object of the Christian ministry. To achieve this is not its appropriate work, though this will be one of its incidental, earthly results. Far higher and nobler is its mission. It looks only to spiritual and eternal interests. It aims to leave its entire, its saving impression, on the soul of man. It would transform the heart into the image of God. It would restore to the soul its divine life. It would unite it, in indissoluble bonds of love, to its Maker. It would not leave one, of all the race for whom Christ died, an outcast from heaven, a wanderer from God. It would place a crown on every head, and a harp of praise in every hand. It would gather from the wide ruins of the fall, precious stones for that spiritual building whose foundation was laid in Zion, and which shall continue to rise, in its fair proportions, and with ever increasing beauty and grandeur, till all the ransomed of the race shall be embraced in its living walls. It would teach every benighted child of earth the song of redemption, and prepare them all for the grand chorus in which shall unite the immense throng that shall be gathered around the throne.

With nothing short of this glorious consumma-

tion would it be satisfied. And for the accomplishment of a work so benevolent, so sublime, it labors not in vain. Its wishes transcend not the power that is enlisted in it. It is God who has established the preaching of the cross, as the channel of divine communication, of saving power to the soul; and who worketh in it, and through it, to secure for the race the blessings for which Christ died. The generous and noble aims of the preacher of the cross shall, therefore, ultimately find their full accomplishment. The work will continue, doubtless, for long years to come, to meet with hinderances and delays in different parts of the wide field. The time of perfect completion is not yet. "The burden and heat of the day" has not all been borne. But though delayed, it shall not fail. The entire harvest shall be gathered, not one sheaf missing.

And what a harvest will it be! A single soul, redeemed from sin and made the heir of endless glory, would more than justify all the labors of all the preachers of Christ of all time. It would dignify and ennoble their office more than all earthly achievements — all the accumulations of wealth, the results of science, the inventions of genius. But instead of a single soul, multitudes which no man can number, out of every kindred and tongue

and people, will be gathered at last on Mount Zion—the work of that preaching which the world now, as of old, calls foolishness. But it will appear foolish no longer, when its collected results shall shine forth in the clear sunlight of heaven; when the saved of all ages and all lands shall come to their home; when the rich fruits of early revivals shall be the joy and crown of rejoicing to Apostles and Martyrs; when the trophies that have crowned the later victories of the cross, in Christian lands and on heathen shores, shall testify in honor of the faithful preacher and pastor; and when coming centuries shall bring in the full complement of the redeemed, and the cross shall have completed its work on earth.

All these, thus gathered to the mansions prepared for them, by the preaching of the cross as the main instrumentality, shall be as gems of immortal beauty in the Saviour's crown, and shall shine forth in glory everlasting, when all the beauty and excellence of earth, the noblest works of art, the most valuable products of science, the richest stores of literature, with all the forms and varieties of material wealth, shall be burned up and remembered no more. In that day of rejoicing, what honor, what dignity shall crown the instrumentality by which all this happiness to man

and glory to God has been achieved. While the names and deeds of the great, which history emblazoned and immortalized on earth, and whose influence was felt in the world's affairs for centuries, shall all be forgotten, or thought unworthy to be mentioned, the humblest faithful preacher of the cross, whose name was hardly known on earth but to be despised, shall be held in everlasting remembrance — shall shine “as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars forever and ever.” The long line of Prophets and Apostles, of pastors and teachers, whose talents the sacred office honored on earth, shall forever rejoice, with a common joy, in the finished work of redemption.

In view of such results, in anticipation of such scenes, can we speak in terms too glowing of the sacred office, or labor too earnestly to remove the reproach which the spirit of the world would cast upon it. Such reproach exists; and it is exerting a most unfavorable influence in deterring pious young men of education from entering the ministry. They are crowding the other professions. They are devoting their talents and attainments to earthly pursuits. I would not question their motives, but I do question their wisdom. The temptation is frequently very strong to regard some other

profession as more honorable than the ministry, as opening a wider field for the exhibition of talent and learning, as ensuring a more durable and lasting reputation among men, and therefore promising greater usefulness. But let such as are exposed to this temptation remember, and seriously consider it, that the cause of Christ at home and abroad is suffering, not for want of competent men in any of the other professions, but for want of well qualified and faithful preachers of the gospel of Christ. This, next to a more elevated piety, is the great demand of the age and the world. How can this demand be met, if young men of piety and education close their ears against the distinct voice of the great Head of the Church, and turn aside to other pursuits? Where are to be found the men who, in a few years, are to stand in the pulpits of New England, and break the bread of life to the descendants of the Pilgrims? Whence are to come, in sufficient numbers, those who will plant the standard of the cross along the rapidly extending borders of civilization in our own country, and carry the blessings of salvation to the perishing millions of other lands?

While questions like these are pressing upon us for an answer, it is with no ordinary interest that we welcome to the sacred office this day, the young

men who have generously devoted their talents, and the liberal culture of years, to the preaching of the cross. Other fields, we know, and those most inviting to a worldly mind, opened before them. The delights of learning, the attractions of wealth, the gratification of taste, might all have been theirs. But these they have counted but loss for Christ. They have put on the armor, not knowing where, in the wide field, they will be called to use it. With a holy purpose, with a firm resolve, they hold themselves in readiness for any work of their Master.

We bid them welcome to the privileges and trials of the sacred ministry. We receive them to the honored service in which Apostles and Martyrs labored for Christ. May the presence of the God of the Fathers be with them, whether laboring amidst the churches of their native State, or in heathen lands; and when their work shall be done, may they and we receive the reward of good and faithful servants.

